



وزارة التعليم  
Ministry of Education



المعرض والمؤتمر الدولي للتعليم العالي  
International Exhibition & Conference on Higher Education

The 8<sup>th</sup> International Exhibition & Conference on Higher Education

**TRANSFORMING**  
**Saudi Universities in an**  
**ERA OF CHANGE.**

**10 – 13 April 2019**

Riyadh International Convention and  
Exhibition Center

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# IECHE 2019

"The International Exhibition & Conference on Higher Education"

The world has changed, but the university has not kept up. The pace of change continues to accelerate and unless the university can become more agile and adapt more quickly, it will become increasingly alienated from the society it is meant to serve.

The university has multiple functions in contemporary society. As in the past, the university must prepare graduates for the first stage of their career or for the possibility of further study and research. Beyond that, the university must provide today's students with the skills and abilities that they will need to adapt to future changes in the social, political and economic environments. We must keep in mind that jobs no longer last a lifetime, that technology and globalization are changing the nature of the workplace and that basic skills such as general knowledge, patterns of leadership, and communication are all of central importance. Considering how unpredictable the future has become—these are significant challenges. Postsecondary education plays a key role in preparing the professionals of tomorrow who can adapt to continuous and revolutionary changes—and universities play a significant role in the intellectual and economic life of all societies.

To keep pace with change, the Saudi leadership has outlined challenges and goals for the nation in Vision 2030 that require an active role for higher education. Vision 2030 recognizes the critical importance of cultivating a new generation of highly-trained human resources with a range of skills to promote a diversified and innovative economy. Dramatic progress has already been achieved in increasing participation in higher education generally, but with a particularly impressive increase in the participation of women. New bylaws contemplate more autonomy for Saudi universities making international engagement and benchmarking against current trends and best practices more important than ever.



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The 8th IECHE conference builds on issues discussed in the previous IECHE—the transitions taking place in Saudi society and elsewhere and the issues that universities will have to address to respond to a changing environment. Changes taking place include the rapid advance of technologies that are making many jobs obsolete; diversifying economies in need of new skills; a changing role for women and the need to leverage their talent in many areas where they have been absent in the past; shifting international alliances and tensions that have economic consequences. The strategies for educating and preparing university graduates for adulthood in the past are no longer adequate—graduates will be entering a much more complicated and volatile world.

Our conferences bring to Riyadh top global thinkers along with key Saudi leaders in education and the economy to engage in dialog about the central issues facing higher education and society in a period of dramatic change. This makes for stimulating discussion. The organization of the conference—with an emphasis on dialog among our invited experts and interaction with the audience—is a successful mechanism for stimulating participation and the free exchange of ideas and perspectives from everyone present.

In addition to keynotes by leading voices in international higher education, the following sessions will provide opportunities to view the university from different vantage points:

- Rethinking the university
- Growing leadership opportunities for women in science and entrepreneurship
- Vision and inspiration: New governance models
- Artificial Intelligence and the iGen: The future of learning and teaching
- Skills and the future of work

## Rethinking the university

As loosely connected groups of individuals with advanced education in distinct disciplines or discrete operational functions, universities are not positioned to restructure the way they operate. Yet restructuring is necessary. All students, regardless of field of study, will need to know how to engage with technology. All students in scientific and technical fields will need the skills acquired through the study of humanities and social sciences. To prepare students for a changing world, graduates will need a broad and diverse base of skills and knowledge to call on in order to adapt. Interdisciplinary, not multi-disciplinary, learning and study is now essential, and this implies a different kind of institutional integration and internal interaction.

## Adapting to change

Governance and leadership are key elements of successful transition and reform. Historically universities have been difficult institutions to change. As many scholars have noted, the university is a sui generis institution—a community of highly educated and independent individuals accustomed to a great deal of autonomy. Change implies strong leadership, broad engagement, as well as incentives to encourage faculty and staff to consider and implement new ideas. Hierarchical models of governance are less effective for engaging



academic communities in broad-based change—new approaches to institutional governance are needed.

The growing participation of women in all fields of study and practice requires considerable cultural accommodation, not only in Saudi Arabia, but everywhere. Universities have a key role in encouraging and developing female talent, but also ensuring that women and men can collaborate in environments that promote mutual respect.

### What should be taught

As Saudi Arabia continues on the path to a diversified economy, less dependent on oil, the country will need to cultivate new talent and skills. The economy of the future will require entrepreneurs and innovators. The traditional university model of educating students in lecture halls is not well suited to this objective. Students today need to be actively involved with solving real problems and issues in their field of study and skilled in the use of evolving technologies before they graduate.

Employers nearly everywhere expect university graduates to have professional knowledge and skills but also a range of “soft skills”. The cultivation of skills such as creativity, critical analysis, written and oral communication, the ability to work in diverse teams, the ability to solve complex problems, etc. has to be integrated across

the curriculum. This implies rethinking the design of degree programs and requires orientation and support for professors who will be required to teach differently.

Although it is highly likely that most university graduates will need additional education in the future to learn new skills and integrate new technologies, continuing education is less likely to provide the opportunity for personal development that the undergraduate experience can encourage and facilitate. For most young students, the university is the last stage of their education before entering the adult world as citizens, professionals, artists, or pursuing whatever path they choose. The university needs to reflect deeply on how best to prepare them for entry.



**“ Transforming Saudi Universities in an Era of Change”.**

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## Conclusion

IECHE 2019 builds on the discussions of 2017, drawing attention to the need for the university to adapt to a changing world. The education experience of the generation teaching could not be more different from the experiences that today's students have lived before they arrive at the university. Technical resources and information easily available on the Internet today require an overhaul of the university experience. Universities need to reconsider how best to leverage the time that students spend in the pursuit of their degree, the profile of the individuals they hope to graduate, and the skills their graduates will need. Universities must become better connected and more responsive to the rapid changes beyond the campus. New governance models and leadership styles will be necessary to ensure that these unique communities adapt and continue to meet the critical needs of the societies that host them.

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